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ON PAGE E 15

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Soviet Breaches of Treaty Promises

For reasons that are not clear, the Carter administration has proved reluctant to call the Soviet Union to account for two glaring breaches of solemn treaty promises reported by U.S. intelligence agencies.

The two episodes — a Sept. 14 underground nuclear test and last year's germ-warfare accident in Sverdlovsk — provided convincing evidence that the Kremlin has been systematically violating provisions of two arms-control treaties with the United States. The agreements are the Threshold Test Ban Treaty of 1976 and the bacteriological weapons ban signed in 1972.

Intelligence sources told my associate Dale Van Atta the September nuclear explosion was somewhere between 160 and 650 kilotons. Many experts conclude that the wide divergence in measurement data suggests that the actual intensity of the blast was around 400 kilotons.

U.S. officials could not ignore the incident, as they have often done in previous cases, because even the lowest yield estimate was well above the 150-kiloton limit permitted by the threshold treaty. So the United States officially expressed "concern" to Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin.

The violation of the germ-warfare treaty could be even more serious. The Sverdlovsk disaster, which killed hundreds of Soviet citizens by the release of deadly anthrax bacilli, was apparently the final evidence needed to persuade the CIA that the Russians have

been developing biological weapons for offensive use, probably since World War II.

In late April 1979, Sverdlovsk residents were jolted by a loud explosion, probably in a laboratory at the biological warfare installation in the Chakalov district of the city. Clouds of anthrax bacilli were released.

Reservists at the military base were the first to die. Next were workers at a ceramics factory downwind, where ventilators sucked in concentrated quantities of the anthrax germs.

The official Soviet explanation was that the victims, who died within six or seven hours, had contracted anthrax from an illegally slaughtered cow. A classified CIA report dated April 4, 1980, notes that, however, the deaths "were caused by pulmonary anthrax as opposed to gastric or skin anthrax, which would be more likely if anthrax-contaminated beef were eaten or handled."

"The ceramics factory was sprayed inside and out with chloramine, and large areas around the military installation were graded and covered with asphalt," the CIA reported. "Wild animals in a small forest near the [facility] were allegedly killed, and most dogs in the city district were picked up and destroyed."

The exact number of casualties was covered up, but analysts have estimated the toll at between 200 and 1,000. "Unconfirmed reports claimed that the installation commander, a general officer, committed suicide fol-

lowing the first casualties," the CIA report states.

Noting that an effective lethal dose for an individual is 10,000 anthrax spores, the CIA concludes that an extremely large number of the spores must have been released — "effectively negating any assessment of peaceful or defensive research being conducted there."